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REPORT

Of the Assistant Inspector of Public Schools upon the condition of
the French Schools in the United Counties of Prescott and
Russell.

Presented to the Legislative Assembly,

By Command,

ARTHUR S. HARDY,
Provincial Secretary.

25th January, 1888.

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REPORT

OF THE ASSISTANT INSPECTOR OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS UPON THE CONDITION OF THE FRENCH SCHOOLS IN THE UNITED COUN- TIES OF PRESCOTT AND RUSSELL.

The Honorable the Minister of Education :

SIR,—I have the honor to submit the following report upon the condition of the French schools in the Counties of Prescott and Russell, with some general remarks suggested by what I have noticed on my visits of inspection.

I will not enter into general statistics, as all the reports are made to Mr. W. J. Summerby, Inspector, and will confine myself to what came to my notice. The total number of schools under my control is sixty-five, and I have the satisfaction to state that they are doing better work than when they were under the supervision of English Inspectors, who had not enough knowledge of the French to address the pupils in their mother tongue, much less to correct the pronunciation and examine in the various subjects taught.

The greater part of the buildings are log houses; six are clapboarded, two frame and four brick. Where they are not clapboarded the outside walls are whitewashed once or twice a year. Generally, the accommodation is not all that could be desired; but in most cases the authorities show a praiseworthy desire to make what improvements are within their reach. The provisions for lighting are in most instances very defective, very often the seats being placed so as to injuriously affect the children's eyes. With the exception of the schools of Curran, Alfred, Wendover, L'Original, Hawkesbury and No. 8 Clarence, where the windows are made to lower from the top, the means for proper ventilation are found wanting. The doors and windows being the only means to let out vitiated air, must necessarily be pernicious to the children. To obviate the danger incurred where the pure outside air is not admitted, I have advised and made it a rule for all the teachers to break the morning and afternoon sessions by a recess.

The school boards of Curran, Wendover, Alfred, Clarence Creek, L'Original, Hawkesbury, No. 7 Russell, No. 16 Clarence, have wisely provided well-fenced playgrounds. Some school grounds are partially enclosed; while others are altogether unenclosed, and the children of those schools naturally look to the road as being the most suitable place to take exercise. During the last six years five houses have been repaired and twelve have been built anew, that of Curran costing \$2,100, Alfred, \$1,900, Wendover \$1,000, and No. 8 Clarence \$1,100, not including the desks. The lighting and ventilation of these schools is quite satisfactory.

Reading shows a marked improvement from year to year. In schools of fair standing the subject is well taught and pupils give the selections with natural expression, but I must admit that in schools of rather low standing the lessons are read without any attention being given to the articulation, pausing and expression. Bad reading is ordinarily found in the classes of those teachers who care more for killing time than for the advancement of their pupils. In about one half of the schools the junior classes are taught reading by the phonetic method, which is certainly well adapted to the French, and for this reason I consider it far superior to any other. I regret very much to state that in certain sections the parents offer much opposition to this most excellent method, alleging that they want their children to be taught according to the French-Canadian pronunciation; but I hope that in due time we will overcome this difficulty and convince all opponents that if children are taught to read French they must also be taught to give the correct French pronunciation. It is gratifying for me to state that all pupils of the first class are required to reproduce the lesson in writing on the slate; this, no doubt,

affords them the means of spelling words correctly, and has the double advantage of keeping them orderly. Pupils of the second class are also required to write the selection on the slate, and besides to give its contents orally and in their own words, which with the help of a judicious teacher must be valuable as a language lesson. Pupils of the third and fourth classes give out in writing the contents of one or two paragraphs of the reading lesson. I consider this very effective as an exercise in spelling and composition. In mentioning this, of course, I have only reference to the schools which are considered thoroughly good. In writing the standard is quite satisfactory, the copy books are generally kept clean and in good condition, but I must admit that many teachers do not pay sufficient attention to the teaching of this subject; the principles being rarely illustrated on the blackboard. In junior classes slate writing has made remarkable progress; it is not uncommon to find little children either writing or printing a line or so of their lesson in a very legible manner. Arithmetic, which, I am sorry to say, was a neglected subject, receives much attention in all the schools and is fairly progressing. To show to what extent this subject was neglected, I may mention that I once inquired of a lady teacher how many times a week she taught it and she answered that she taught arithmetic once a week, on Friday afternoon. Not long ago teachers hardly taught this subject to junior classes, confining them to reading and a little writing, the result being that children were found reading in the second book and were quite ignorant of numeration and notation; with the goodwill and co-operation of the teachers this state of things has changed, and they are taught to solve practical problems in an intellectual manner. Mental work, which was considered of very little importance, receives more attention than formerly and progresses satisfactorily. In the course of last year drawing has been introduced in a few of our schools. Children take a delight in this subject, they regard it as an amusement and a recreation. The most pleasing feature is that parents offer no opposition to the study of this new subject. Soon after my appointment I felt that something had to be done to elevate the standard of the schools. I therefore organized local meetings of the teachers in order to discuss and adopt the best methods of teaching. All the subjects are treated practically, and are illustrated by having in attendance classes of the pupils attending the school where these meetings are held. These, and a better attendance at the General Convention, have contributed much to the advancement of the schools. As it has been publicly asserted that the French are particularly averse to having the English taught, I must mention that forty-three teachers and four assistants teach English reading and spelling, and in some cases the translation of the English into French is also taught. Twenty-seven teach nothing but French, but of these twenty-one have some knowledge of the English, so that it leaves only six teachers who have no knowledge of the English. I have much pleasure in stating that when I visited the village school of Clarence, which is directed by Mr. Telesphue Rochon, after having gone through the various exercises, this gentleman intimated that his pupils could sing. I therefore invited them to prove their proficiency in this art, and was treated to a real good French song; then came last, but not least, the "God Save the Queen," which was executed in a truly grand style and in pretty good English. The lack of training and special preparation for the profession is a great drawback on the French schools of these counties. I looked forward with much pleasure on the establishment of a model school where our teachers would have the advantage of acquiring the knowledge that would fit them for the profession, and steps were taken to have it in operation last fall, but as the services of an efficient teacher could not be secured, the idea had to be abandoned for the time. Efforts will be made to have it opened in the course of the present year. There has been a change for the better since my first visit in 1881, and, on the whole, the work of education is carried on in a satisfactory manner.

The text books used in the schools are as follows:—

Reading—Graded series by Montpetit, being composed of the Alphabet, 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Books, and a Treatise on Pronunciation by l'Abbe Lagace.

Grammar—By E. Robert Larrusse and Christian Brothers.

Geography—Primary, Intermediate and General, by Christian Brothers.

Arithmetic—Kirkland & Scott, Hamblin Smith and Christian Brothers.

Canadian History—By F. X. Toussaint.

English History—By Larrusse.

Composition—Methode pratique et raisonnée de style et decomposition by E. Robert.

Object Lessons—Recueil de Leçons de choses by J. B. Cloutier.

Drawing—By W. Smith and Canadian Drawing Course.

English Translation—Nouveau Cours of Obendorff.

Dictionary—Chambers' Etymological and Universal Classique.

There is no particular text book in spelling, this subject being taught from the reading lessons.

Your Obedient Servant,

O. DUFORT,
Assistant Inspector Public Schools.

March 25th, 1887.



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